



# Fast Facts

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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## **CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS (crip-to-spor-id-i-o-sis)**

### **What is Cryptosporidiosis?**

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease of the intestinal tract caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium parvum*. It has been known to cause disease in humans only since 1976. *Cryptosporidium* lives in a protective shell called an oocyst. This enables it to survive many environmental conditions and be resistant to disinfection.

### **How is Cryptosporidiosis Spread?**

Cryptosporidiosis is spread by putting something in one's mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person or animal. It can be spread in the following ways:

- Drinking contaminated water.
- Swallowing water while swimming in contaminated waters.
- Contact with the stool of infected animals (e.g., pets and farm animals).
- Contact with the stool of infected persons (e.g., changing diapers, sexual practices).
- Eating contaminated undercooked foods (rare occurrence).
- Hand-to-mouth transfer of oocysts from surfaces that may have become contaminated with an infected stool.

The levels of *Cryptosporidium* present in a public drinking water system in California are very low and should not be of health concern to the general public.

### **Symptoms of Cryptosporidiosis**

Symptoms may appear two to ten days after infection by a parasite. Some symptoms include watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps, and sometimes nausea, vomiting, and low-grade fever. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration.

In otherwise healthy persons, these symptoms usually last one to two weeks, at which time the immune system is able to stop the infection. In people with a suppressed immune system, the infection may continue and become life threatening. Examples of people who may have a suppressed immune system are individuals who have AIDS, individuals who recently underwent an organ or bone marrow transplant, or individuals who are undergoing chemotherapy.

## **Treatment of Cryptosporidiosis**

There is no specific treatment for cryptosporidiosis. For people with a normal immune system, the disease is short term. For people with AIDS, some drugs may provide temporary relief from symptoms.

## **Prevention of Cryptosporidiosis**

Individuals must decide for themselves whether to take any special precautions to prevent cryptosporidiosis. Most people don't need to take any special precautions because the disease is not life threatening to persons with a healthy immune system. However, there are a number of precautions people can take to prevent this disease:

- Avoid swallowing lake, river, and swimming pool waters.
- Avoid sexual practices that could result in contact with feces.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers and before handling food. If you use gloves during diaper changing, change them between each child.
- If you are a care giver of patients with cryptosporidiosis, wash your hands after bathing patients, emptying bedpans, changing soiled linen, or coming in contact with a patient's stool.
- If you work on a farm, wash your hands before eating and at the end of every work shift. Ensure that fecal material from the work place is not being transported elsewhere via boots, clothing, tools, etc.
- Wash your hands after gardening or other contact with soil.

Additionally, for those people who have a serious immune system deficiency, it is recommended that they drink distilled water or water that has been brought to a rolling boil for one minute. Ice should also be made from boiled or distilled water.

## **Information**

- If you suspect that you have cryptosporidiosis, see your physician as soon as possible, especially if your immune system is suppressed, so that the disease can be properly identified and monitored.
- For more information about cryptosporidiosis, please contact the Department of Health Services (DHS), Division of Communicable Disease Control, at (510) 540-2566.
- For more information about your local drinking water quality, please contact your local drinking water utility, or you may contact DHS's Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Management at (510) 540-2158.